

# U. S. SUPPRESSION OF NEWS CHARGED

Press Officials Tell Inquiry  
Public's Right to Facts  
Is Being Endangered

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 7—Newspaper men told Congress today that official suppression of news was seriously endangering the public's right to know the facts about Government activities.

But they were unable to give a House Government Operations subcommittee more than general suggestion as to what to do about it.

At an informal panel discussion opening public hearings on Government secrecy, the subcommittee heard participants agree that there was both deliberate withholding of news and "managing of news" that sometimes gave the country a false impression of Government policies.

James S. Pope, executive editor of the Louisville (Ky.) Courier-Journal, and former chairman of the freedom of information committee of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, said the public's "right to freedom of information" had been "invaded and flouted" by executive departments and agencies. He said that while the Eisenhower Administration had improved over past Administrations in some respects, there had been a "frightening deterioration" policy in the Defense Department.

"There is a state of mind of arrogance and contempt for the public on the part of some officials of the Government," Mr. Pope said. "The fact that we have to fight for freedom of information is a disgrace."

## A 'Fundamental' Right

Mr. Pope said the right of free access to news was as fundamental as the right to jury trial and other basic guarantees of the Constitution.

"You, I hope," he said, "will be able to change the laws and give us a legal right to some of these things which we already have as a matter of principle."

J. Russell Wiggins, executive editor of The Washington Post and Times-Herald, and present chairman of the society's freedom of information committee, strongly criticized the "ominous" secrecy now prevalent in the Defense Department and the National Security Council.

"The requirements of national military safety are not overlooked by newspaper editors," he said. "They are quite familiar with the necessities of defense in a hostile world. They do not think, however, that we need to make the hard choice between abandoning our safety and abandoning our freedom. They think we can have both safety and freedom."

Richard W. Slocum, executive vice president of The Philadelphia Bulletin and president of the American Newspaper Publishers Association, agreed that editors recognize the need for secrecy concerning matters involving military security. He suggested that Congress write into legislation an "affirmative expression" of the public's right of free access to all other types of information.

"Whatever right the press has to information is a public right," he said. "We are the acting trustees of a public right."

## Geneva Parley Cited

James Reston, Washington correspondent of The New York Times, noted what he termed the Government's "growing tendency to manage the news."

As an example, he cited the "conscious effort" to give official news of the Big Four conference at Geneva last August "an optimistic flavor." Later, he said, this optimism had to be revised downward by the Government when it became apparent that Russian policy actually had not changed.

Mr. Reston said it was understandable that the Government should insist upon secrecy concerning negotiations with its allies in the free world coalition. But he criticized secrecy when used by such agencies as the Bureau of the Budget in attempting to conceal facts concerning purely domestic matters.

Mr. Reston also said the "whole area" of the supersecret Central Intelligence Agency is creating "growing problems for the press" that the subcommittee ought to look into.

Joseph Alsop Jr., Washington columnist and author, strongly criticized Government officials for withholding from the American people facts on Russian advances in military weapons obviously known to the Russians themselves.

Guy Easterly, publisher of The La Follette (Tenn.) Press and chairman of the freedom of information committee of the National Editorial Association, and Hugh Boyd, publisher of The New Brunswick (N. J.) Home News, said smaller newspapers were fully aware of the need for greater information since Government activities now affected even the smallest communities.

Harold L. Cross, freedom of information counsel for American Society of Newspaper Editors, and V. M. Newton Jr., managing editor of The Tampa (Fla.) Morning Tribune and chairman of the freedom of information committee of Sigma Delta Chi, national professional journalism fraternity, joined in attacking Government security classification. Mr. Cross said Congress had contributed to the problem by making legislation giving agencies the right to classify "so vague and so loose" that abuses could easily develop.

Theodore F. Koop, director of Washington news and public affairs for the Columbia Broadcasting System, said that the House of Representatives was the chief offender in preventing the spread of television and radio coverage of public events. Speaker Sam Rayburn of Texas has ruled that TV and radio may not cover House hearings.

Wade H. Nichols, editor and publisher of Redbook magazine, said magazine writers found much the same restrictions as those facing the daily press.

Clark Mollenhoff of the Washington bureau of The Des Moines Register and Tribune and The Minneapolis Star and Tribune said a Presidential directive of May 17, 1954, designed to prevent testimony about a White House meeting, since had been used by many other agencies to justify withholding information from Congress and the press.